VIOLENCE

There are some hard facts that do not fit into my picture of America.

The daily chronicle of events in the newspapers of the United States is full of crimes of passion, murder, rape, juvenile delinquency, and other violence. Even taking account of the size of the country and the demand of the reading public for a complete coverage of these macabre events, this gruesome chronicle does not accord with my picture of America as a land of kind, friendly, easygoing people who are more inclined to smile than to scowl. I do not know how to reconcile this contradiction. Perhaps the explanation lies in the coincidence of many factors: lack of uniformity in communal life, lack of tradition, excessive mobility of the population, volatility of the American character, defects in the school system, lack of discipline in family life and, of course, the usual social evils—poor housing, weakness of the social welfare system, and so on.

The wave of violence epitomizes a number of important unsolved problems. I do not believe, however, that these problems are a distinctive feature of current American civilization. Similar phenomena exist in other countries, and there is no reliable common yardstick for international comparison of their frequency. There may be some consistent bias in recording acts of violence in the United States in comparison with the countries that have a less efficient press and less developed means of communication.

Moreover, along with manifestations of moral anarchy, the daily chronicle of this country records acts of goodwill, kindness, and often heroism that could fill many columns in the newspapers were they reported in the same detail and with the same gusto as are the sordid stories. There has to be something extraordinary—a touch of tragedy or sentimentality or humor—to convert the better side of human nature and national character into a good newspaper story.

The average American is too civilized to find pleasure in bullfighting, but he must have a properly assorted supply of horror stories with his breakfast, and the newspapers do their best to meet his demand.

A NATION ON THE MOVE

Driving across this continent, we often had the impression that the people of the United States have not yet settled down in the expanse between the two oceans. The center of population is still moving westward, several miles each year, according to our decennial censuses. The movements of people are like currents in the ocean. There is a continu-